

## Sūrah Bayyinah

### Central Theme and Relationship with Previous Sūrah

This *sūrah* is the counterpart of Sūrah Qadr, the previous *sūrah*. The exaltedness of the Qur'ān is mentioned in it and it is explained that the reason because of which the People of the Book and the Idolaters of Makkah had formed an alliance at that time to reject the Qur'ān was not because they had any real doubt about it; but the fact of the matter was that it was their conceit and arrogance which led them to this attitude. Outwardly they would show that if some open sign is shown to them about the veracity of the Qur'ān, they would profess belief in it; however, this was just a deception on their part for even the greatest of signs and miracles would not convince them in this matter. Even if they witness such a sign, they would make up some excuse to cover up their haughtiness. If the People of the Book who were at that time supporting the Idolaters and implanting objections in their heart to deny the Qur'ān take a look at their character in the light of their own history, it will become evident to them that the type of miracles they are demanding today were also demanded earlier by their predecessors from their respective prophets. They were even shown these miracles and in spite of this they wreaked havoc with the religion of God and His Book. The real thing which is needed to profess faith is a feeling of fear for the Almighty. Those who have this fear will believe in this Book. As far as people whose hearts have hardened are concerned, they will not believe in it however great a sign be shown to them.

### Period of Revelation

Some exegetes regard this *sūrah* to be revealed in Madīnah. To me, this opinion is not correct. Perhaps the reason for holding this view is that besides the Idolaters, this *sūrah* also mentions the behaviour of the People of the Book. However, merely such a reference is not enough to regard a *sūrah* to be Madīnan. If readers have had a chance to read through the previous groups of the Qur'ān, they would have observed that in every group, the last Makkan *sūrahs* allude to the behaviour of the People of the Book besides that of the Idolaters and this expression gradually becomes more and more pronounced. The reason for this is that in Makkah the matter of a new prophet and a new message was not such that the People of the Book, specially the Jews could remain indifferent to it. Their scholars already feared the advent of a new prophet because of the

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predictions found in their scriptures. So, how could they disregard this new call. However, in the beginning, they did not take any practical part in opposing this call because observing the intense enmity of the Quraysh they thought that they would be enough to end this new faith. So when they saw that this message was spreading in spite of the opposition of the Quraysh, they started to support them. Initially, the method they adopted for this was to implant and suggest objections and questions to the Quraysh which they were told to ask the Prophet (sws) in order to pester and harass him. Then because of their claim to religious superiority, they devised certain self-made criteria for a prophet and asked the Quraysh to judge this new prophet on the basis of these criteria. For example, they told the Quraysh that they have been directed in their scriptures to not corroborate any prophethood unless a fire descends from the sky and consumes an animal sacrifice offered by the new prophet. The Qur'ān has referred to these pranks of theirs at a number of places. The Jews had taken to this mischief in the very beginning and hence we find its reference at various places in the Makkan *sūrahs*. In this *sūrah* too, their alliance with the Quraysh is referred to for this purpose.

### **Analysis of the Discourse**

The sequence of this *sūrah*'s discourse is as follows:

(Verses 1-3): First, an assurance is sounded to the Prophet (sws) that he should not think that the mischief-mongers among the Quraysh and the People of the Book who are opposing him would desist from their ways at any cost and accept the Qur'ān. They will only believe when an angel will descend from the skies whilst reading some scripture and they are able to observe him in this state.

(Verses 4-5): After this, the attitude of the People of the Book is criticized: these disgraceful people are lending support to the Quraysh out of their enmity for the Prophet (sws). Such is the extent of their misfortune that they witnessed great miracles but still they could not embrace the religion of God. In fact, they remained blind even after seeing these miracles and could not remain united on the foundations of religion in which there is no room for any difference of opinion.

(Verses 6-8): In the end, both the Quraysh and the People of the Book are sternly reprimanded on their pride and vanity: they consider themselves to be very superior and for this reason are not willing to even entertain the new call; the fact of the matter is that they are the worst of God's creatures; they shall be thrown into Hell. Only those people are of any status before God who profess faith in Him without seeing Him and do righteous deeds and not the conceited who would only believe once they have seen everything from their very eyes.

## Text and Translation

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

لَمْ يَكُنْ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا مِنْ أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ وَالْمُشْرِكِينَ مُنْفَكِّينَ حَتَّى تَأْتِيَهُمُ الْبَيِّنَةُ (١)  
رَسُولٌ مِنَ اللَّهِ يَتْلُو صُحُفًا مُطَهَّرَةً (٢) فِيهَا كُتِبَ قَيِّمَةٌ (٣) وَ مَا تَفَرَّقَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا  
الْكِتَابَ إِلَّا مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا جَاءَتْهُمْ الْبَيِّنَةُ (٤) وَمَا أُمِرُوا إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ مُخْلِصِينَ لَهُ الدِّينَ  
خُنَفَاءَ وَيُقِيمُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَيُؤْتُوا الزَّكَاةَ وَذَلِكَ دِينُ الْقَيِّمَةِ (٥) إِنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا مِنْ أَهْلِ  
الْكِتَابِ وَالْمُشْرِكِينَ فِي نَارِ جَهَنَّمَ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا أُولَئِكَ هُمْ شَرُّ الْبَرِيَّةِ (٦) إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا  
وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ أُولَئِكَ هُمْ خَيْرُ الْبَرِيَّةِ (٧) جَزَاءُهُمْ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ جَنَّاتٌ عَدْنٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ  
تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا أَبَدًا رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ وَرَضُوا عَنْهُ ذَلِكَ لِمَنْ خَشِيَ رَبَّهُ (٨)

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Ever Merciful.

Those among the People of the Book and the Idolaters who have denied [the Qur'ān] shall not give up their stubbornness until there comes to them a clear sign – a messenger from Allah reciting purified pages in which are written clear directives. (1-3)

The fact of the matter is that the People of the Book differed only after such a clear sign had come to them. They had been directed to worship God alone, obeying Him exclusively with sincere devotion and to show diligence in the prayer and to pay *zakāh* and this is the religion of the Upright Nation. (4-5)

Indeed, those among the People of the Book and the Idolaters who disbelieved shall be cast into the fire of Hell to dwell there forever. These very people are the worst of creatures. (6)

Indeed, those who embraced faith and did righteous deeds, they, indeed, are the best of creatures. Their reward with Allah is the gardens of eternity beneath which rivers flow. They will dwell there forever. God is pleased with them and they with Him. This is the reward of him who feared his Lord. (7-8)

## Explanation

لَمْ يَكُنْ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا مِنْ أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ وَالْمُشْرِكِينَ مُنْفَكِّينَ حَتَّى تَأْتِيَهُمُ الْبَيِّنَةُ (١)<sup>1</sup>

Here the expression لَمْ يَكُنْ does not convey the sense of an incomplete verb (فعل ناقص). It conveys the sense of a complete verb the

1. Those among the People of the Book and the Idolaters who have denied [the Qur'ān] shall not give up their stubbornness until there comes to them a clear sign.

way its inflection does in the verse (وَكَانَ اللَّهُ عَلِيمًا حَكِيمًا (٤: ١٧) (God is all-knowing and wise, (4:17)). The translation of the verse had been done keeping in consideration this aspect.

The object of the verb كَفَرُوا is suppressed here because of textual indications. The suppressed object is the Qur'ān and the Messenger which they denied.

The People of the Book and the Idolaters are mentioned here in the capacity of two groups who spearheaded the opposition shown to the Prophet (sws) in those times. The Idolaters showed open opposition while the People of the Book, as we have indicated in the introduction to the *sūrah*, were covert in this regard. When the word *mushrikūn* (Idolaters) is mentioned in the Qur'ān the way it is here, it stands as a proper noun for the Idolaters of the Quraysh or the Idolaters of the Ishmaelites. The Qur'ān is replete with such usage.

The particle مِنْ here is in its commonly known meaning of connoting the sub-set of a whole (تبعيض) because in this verse the character of those groups among the Idolaters and the People of the Book is discussed who were blindly opposing Islam. In both these religious denominations, all people were not alike; they also contained some solemn people who embraced Islam and those who among them who did not embrace Islam either adopted a balanced attitude towards the new faith or remained impartial. The Qur'ān has lauded such people. Thus the particle مِنْ is used here to signify this very divide among them: only those among the People of the Book are referred to here who were not willing to listen to anything unless they were shown the miracles they were demanding.

The expression حَتَّى تَأْتِيَهُمُ الْبَيِّنَةُ (until there comes to them a clear sign) mentions the condition of these stubborn people without whose fulfillment they were not ready to give up their obduracy. بَيِّنَةٌ means “a manifest sign”. By such a manifest sign they meant that such a miracle be shown to them which they would not be able to deny. The Qur'ān has mentioned this demand of theirs at many places. Here are a few examples which would illustrate their mentality in this regard.

In Sūrah Nisā', this demand of the People of the Book is mentioned in the following words:

يَسْأَلُكَ أَهْلُ الْكِتَابِ أَنْ تُنَزِّلَ عَلَيْهِمْ كِتَابًا مِّنَ السَّمَاءِ فَقَدْ سَأَلُوا مُوسَىٰ أَكْبَرَ مِنْ  
ذَلِكَ فَقَالُوا أَرَنَا اللَّهَ جَهْرَةً (١٥٣: ٤)

The People of the Book ask you to bring down directly for them a book from the heavens; [only then will they believe; their demand is not strange at all]; of Moses they demanded an even bigger thing. They

said to him: “Show us God manifestly [then shall we believe].” (4:153)

Similarly, with regard to the *mushrikūn*, it is stated in Sūrah Muddaththir:

بَلْ يُرِيدُ كُلُّ امْرِئٍ مِنْهُمْ أَنْ يُؤْتَى صُحُفًا مُنَشَّرَةً (٧٤: ٥٢)

In fact, each one among them wants that he be handed over open pages. (74:52)

In other words, these people are not willing to believe in the Qur’ān which has been sent down to just one person through divine revelation: their demand is that for each of them a separate scripture be revealed. Only then will they believe that the Almighty has in fact revealed a book for their guidance.

رَسُولٌ مِنَ اللَّهِ يَتْلُو صُحُفًا مُطَهَّرَةً (٢) فِيهَا كُتِبَ قَيِّمَةٌ (٣)<sup>2</sup>

This is an explanation of *al-bayyinah* (the sign) referred to in the previous verse: their demand is that if it is desired that they profess faith, then an angel should directly descend from the Almighty while reading purified pages in which explicit and definite directives are written.

It is evident from the words رَسُولٌ مِنَ اللَّهِ that they did not want any messenger from among human beings claiming that he received divine revelations: they wanted some angel directly sent by the Almighty who would read untouched and pure pages.

The word صَحِيفَةٌ (singular of صُحُف) also connotes “a page”. The implication is that they will not believe the angel if he merely informs them of the messages of the Almighty; They will only believe him when whatever he brings in the name of God should be in fact written and read out to them. The adjective مُطَهَّرَةٌ of pages is meant to indicate that these pages should be pure and untouched. Except for God and the angels no one among men and jinn should have touched them.

Another condition is stated in the next verse: فِيهَا كُتِبَ قَيِّمَةٌ: the written pages should not contain tales and stories from here and there; they should have clear and unambiguous directives written in them so that they are able to readily know what their Lord has allowed and what He has prohibited. The word كُتِبَ is a plural of كَتَبَ. We have already explained its connotations and usages earlier.<sup>3</sup> It was shown there that this word also

2. – A messenger from Allah reciting purified pages in which are written clear directives.

3. See: Amīn Aḥsan Iṣlāḥī, *Tadabbur-i Qur’ān*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., vol. 1 (Lahore: Faran Foundation, 1986), 86.

means directives of the *sharī'ah*. Here in this verse, it is used thus.

The word قَيِّمَةٌ means “straight, clear and explicit”. In other words, they desired explicit directives and did not want that un-related directives be read out to them. Connoisseurs of the language well understand the acerbic ridicule inherent in this word uttered by these mischievous people: their demand was that just as the ten commandments of the Torah had been written on stone tablets, similarly, clear directives written on sheets should be brought to them by the angel; only then will they accept the divinity of the Book of God.

وَمَا تَفَرَّقَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ إِلَّا مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا جَاءَتْهُمْ الْبَيِّنَةُ (٤)<sup>4</sup>

Since the demand mentioned in the previous verse originated from the People of the Book which they implanted in the minds of the Quraysh so that the latter use it against the Qur'ān, the Qur'ān has responded to this demand while keeping them in consideration. It is said that even if these people are shown a miracle on their demand, they are not ones who would believe. Their own history shows that whatever *sharī'ah* they were given, was given in the company of some open miracles. Their Prophet Moses (sws) showed them every now and then such signs of their God which were never ever shown to any people: the ten commandments of the Torah were written on tablets, whilst taking the covenant of *sharī'ah* from them mount Sinai was raised above them and twelve fountains were generated for them from a mountain; however, even after witnessing all these signs and miracles the manner in which they fulfilled their covenant with the *sharī'ah* was that they started worshipping a calf fashioned out by Sāmarī. The first great dissension that arose among them originated from this ugly incident and it continued to increase with the passage of time. A time reached when the only thing common among them was difference.

وَمَا أُمِرُوا إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ مُخْلِصِينَ لَهُ الدِّينَ حُنَفَاءَ وَيُقِيمُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَيُؤْتُوا الزَّكَاةَ وَذَلِكَ دِينُ الْقَيِّمَةِ (٥)<sup>5</sup>

This is an example of the dissension mentioned in the previous verse: there was not a single fundamental tenet of religion to which they adhered. They had serious differences in every tenet of religion; so much

4. The fact of the matter is that the People of the Book differed only after such a clear sign had come to them.

5. They had been directed to worship God alone, obeying Him exclusively with sincere devotion and to show diligence in the prayer and to pay zakāh and this is the religion of the Upright Nation.

so, they lost many of these tenets just because of this attitude.

They had also been directed by the Almighty to adhere to monotheism exclusively obeying Him and fully devoting themselves to Him; however, they ruined this basic teaching of religion. Right in the presence of their prophet, they worshipped the calf, deemed 'Uzayr to be God's son and regarded their religious scholars to be partners of God. They were incriminated with sorcery and magic and went as far as to worship the idols of other nations on which their prophets lamented in a very sad and moving way.

Similarly, they were also directed to offer the prayer and pay *zakāh*. As is explained in the *tafsīr* of Sūrah Baqarah, they totally disregarded the prayer and such was the extent of this disregard that the Torah even became devoid of its mention. The Torah does mention the ritual of animal sacrifice; however, the prayer finds no mention in it. Similar was the case with *zakāh*. Though it did continue to exist in a formal way, yet instead of the poor and needy, the religious scholars of the Levites became its real recipients and if anyone wants to have an idea of the stinginess of these scholars, one only needs to read how the Gospels and scriptures of other prophets portray their greediness.

The words *وَذَلِكَ دِينُ الْقَيِّمَةِ* (and this is the religion of the upright nation) are actually an answer to their demand mentioned earlier by the words *فِيهَا كُتِبَ قَيِّمَةٌ* (in which are written explicit directives). The implication is that if these people really desired clear and explicit directives of religion, they had already been given them in the capacity of the upright and very natural directives of the religion of Abraham (sws). Why did they then show total disregard to them? Similarly, this Qur'ān is also informing them of clear and explicit directives; so why are they also getting after it? The whole implication is that all these questions raised by the People of the Book originate from their jealousy: they wanted others to be deprived of the *sharī'ah* of God, just as they had deprived themselves of it.

In the expression: *وَذَلِكَ دِينُ الْقَيِّمَةِ* an ellipsis of the noun of the adjective *الْقَيِّمَةِ* has occurred which is customary in classical Arabic in the presence of some indication to such an ellipsis. The implied expression is: *وَذَلِكَ دِينُ الْمِلَّةِ الْقَيِّمَةِ*. The objective of this style is to refer to the fact that these are the basic directives of religion which were transferred to both branches of the family of Abraham (sws) as the heritage of its grand progenitor: Abraham (sws). So what a pity if these very branches try to become accomplices in opposing these teachings.

It should be kept in mind that the Qur'ān has introduced the nation of Abraham (sws) with the words *مِلَّةَ قَيِّمَةٍ*. We have explained in detail the meaning of these words in an earlier discussion in this *tafsīr*. Here I shall

contend myself in citing just one verse:

قُلْ إِنِّي هَدَانِي رَبِّي إِلَى صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ دِينًا قِيَمًا مِّلَّةَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ حَنِيفًا (١٦١:٦)

Say: "My Lord has guided me to a straight path: the natural religion the nation of Abraham, with complete devotion." (6:161)

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا مِنْ أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ وَالْمُشْرِكِينَ فِي نَارِ جَهَنَّمَ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا أُولَئِكَ هُمْ شَرُّ الْبَرِيَّةِ (٦:٦)<sup>6</sup>

This verse mentions the fate of people whether from the People of the Book or from the Idolaters who were adamant in rejecting the Qur'ān. Simultaneously, they are condemned for their conceit and pride which was the reason for this rejection.

In spite of being the recipients of the Book of God, if they too turned blind like the Idolaters, there is no reason that they be shown any lenience. It is also emphasized that Hell shall be their eternal abode and it will not be a temporary place of residence for them. Here, it should be noted, a specific view of the People of the Book referred to in the Qur'ān is being criticized. According to this view, they thought that in the first place fire would not touch them and if it did, it would not be for more than a few days.

The sentence *أُولَئِكَ هُمْ شَرُّ الْبَرِيَّةِ* (these very people are the worst of creatures) strikes at their pride and vanity. The condition to profess faith in the Qur'ān imposed by the leaders of the People of the Book and the Idolaters that unless an angel descends from the heavens whilst reading untouched pages or unless each of them is not handed open scriptures, they will not accept that Muḥammad (sws) was truthful in his claim to prophethood was because of their pride and vanity. As per this pride, they were not willing to obey and accept someone as a prophet of God who was inferior to them in worldly status. It was this pride of theirs which became a hindrance for them to accept the truth whereas the truth whether it is small or great is from God before whom it is essential for everyone to submit whether he is a king or a slave. If a person rejects the truth then he is from Satan's progeny and the progeny of Satan are the worst of creatures and Hell is their only abode.

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6. Indeed, those among the People of the Book and the Idolaters who disbelieved shall be cast into the fire of Hell to dwell there forever. These very people are the worst of creatures.



إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ أُولَٰئِكَ هُمْ خَيْرُ الْبَرِيَّةِ (٧)<sup>7</sup>

This is a mention of the servants of God who cleansed themselves from the stigma of conceit. For this reason, the respect for the truth remained intact in them. When they heard the call of the Messenger, they did not make a demand similar to what was demanded by those overcome with conceit. On the other hand, they professed faith in the Book of God and did righteous deeds. The Qur'ān has said that such people are the best of creatures. This is because the real value of a person is not on the basis of his wealth and resources, family and lineage but on the basis of his intellectual and moral abilities. People who have these abilities are noble and of high status in the eyes of God even if they are slaves of Rome and Abyssinia. On the other hand, those who are devoid of these abilities are the worst of creatures in the eyes of God even if they are leaders of the Quraysh and the Hashimites. While reading this verse, one should refresh in one's mind the scorns and rebukes of the Quraysh which they would hurl on the poor among the Muslims when they had newly embraced faith. After such a humiliating attitude from them, who can imagine how happy these Muslims would have been after such praise for them from the Lord of the heavens and the earth.

It should also be kept in consideration that man is the best of God's creation as is mentioned in Sūrah Tīn. The Almighty has created him in the best of moulds with great abilities. If he recognizes his value, he is the best of God's creatures: no other creature of God can rival him. However, if he leads a life while remaining indifferent to his real value he becomes the worst of God's creatures and a true depiction of **ثُمَّ رَدَدْنَاهُ** (Then We turned him to the lowest when he himself acted low, (95:5). Then he falls into such disgrace that no other creature can match him. Just as there is no limit to man's ascent, there is no limit to his descent. What a splendid piece of advice is sounded by sages who have said: "Man! Know thyself."

جَزَاؤُهُمْ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ جَنَّاتٌ عَدْنٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا أَبَدًا رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ وَرَضُوا عَنْهُ ذَٰلِكَ لِمَنْ خَشِيَ رَبَّهُ (٨)<sup>8</sup>

Mentioned in this verse is the reward of those who are the best of

7. Indeed, those who embraced faith and did righteous deeds, they, indeed, are the best of creatures.

8. Their reward with Allah is the gardens of eternity beneath which rivers flow. They will dwell there forever. God is pleased with them and they with Him. This is the reward of him who feared his Lord.

God's creatures. Though they will have to go through the trials and tests destined for them in this world, however they will have such gardens to live in with their Lord below which rivers flow and they will live in them eternally.

We have explained the words جَنَّاتٍ عَدْنٍ elsewhere in this *tafsīr*.

The sentence رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ وَرَضُوا عَنْهُ refers to the fact that these people would be pleased with their Lord and He would be pleased with them. God would be pleased with them because they fulfilled their obligation of serving and worshipping Him to the utmost and in the way He had told them to do so. They would be pleased with God because He not only fulfilled His promises, He also blessed them what they could not have even imagined.

The last part of the verse ذَلِكَ لِمَنْ خَشِيَ رَبَّهُ says that this state will be achieved by those who feared their Lord even though they could not see Him. The implication is that the foolish who want to believe only after witnessing everything from their eyes will continue to wander in darkness. No one can cure them. In this world, the real trial of a person is that while using his intellect and wisdom he should profess faith in realities of which he has been informed of by the Prophets of God. He should not live with closed eyes and ears nor should he wait to profess faith once everything is shown to him. Whoever succeeded in this trial would be worthy of being blessed by the Almighty with His favours. He who failed in this trial is worse than an animal and is not worthy of receiving any blessings from the Almighty.

By the grace of God, with these lines we reach the end of this *sūrah's tafsīr*. فالحمد لله حمدا كثيرا (profound gratitude be to God)

Lahore,  
14 March, 1980 AD  
6 Jamādī al-Awwal, 1400 AH

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